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SUBJECT: FEBRUARY 23 MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY ACS ON GOLDEN MOSQUE BOMBING

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad For Reasons 1.4 (C) and (D).

(S/REL MCFI) SUMMARY: PM Jafari called a Minister's Committee on National Security (MCNS) meeting with the Ambassador, UK Ambassador Patey, MNF-I Commanding General and Deputy Commanding General, and Iraqi Security Ministers to continue addressing the February 22 bombing of the Shia Golden Mosque in Samarra. The GOI enacted a daytime curfew, in addition to the nighttime one, in select provinces and began preliminary work on a comprehensive security plan to include broad-based public outreach to overcome sectarian differences. Despite isolated incidents of violence, with the imposition of the extended curfew the situation is relatively calm in Baghdad. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S/REL MCFI) Jafari called a MCNS meeting on February 23 with the Ambassador, UK Ambassador Patey, and MNF-I CG Casey to continue developing a response to the bombing of the Shia Golden Mosque in Samarra. Also in attendance were Minister of Defense Dulime, Minister of Interior Jabr, Minister of National Security al-Anzi, National Security Advisor Rubaie, and MNF-I DCG Houghton. A smaller follow-up meeting was held on February 24 with Jafari, the Ambassador, Duleime, Rubaie, and Houghton.

¶3. (S/REL MCFI) Jafari characterized the situation as having the potential to lead to civil war. Although some groups and imams are urging calm, he asserted, others are being inflammatory and are playing into the hands of the terrorists inciting violent unrest. Therefore, according to Jafari, the GOI must maintain order, demonstrate that it is in control, and begin actions to unify the nation.

¶4. (S/REL MCFI) After discussions with Ayad Allawi, Tawaffuq leaders and Masoud Barzani, Ambassador pushed Jafari to consider four main proposals: establish an investigative committee on the Askariya Shrine incident; establish a political committee to foster national unity in the wake of the attack; enact a security plan to include bans on public displays of weapons; and issue specific instructions for Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to guard mosques and shrines.

¶5. (S/REL MCFI) After much discussion, it was decided to enact a daytime curfew from 0600 to 1600 on Friday, February 24, and Saturday, February 25, in the provinces of Baghdad, Diyala, Salah al-Din, and Babil. This daytime curfew would be in conjunction with the extended nighttime curfew of 2000 to 0600 that was enacted previously. The governors of the other provinces could decide for themselves if they should apply these curfews to their areas. The main purpose of the curfew is to prevent the conduct of Friday prayers that could lead to further violence and to prevent large groups from

gathering for demonstrations.

¶ 6. (S/REL MCFI) The MCNS later adopted Ambassador's plan to announce the selection of broad-based committees to investigate the Askariya Shrine bombing and to devise outreach methods to unify the populace. Preliminary work is underway to form these committees under the GOI's security plan. Additional highly-publicized statements and appearances -- to include many different sectarian blocs and political and religious leaders -- will follow. Jafari and his staff are planning to enlist leaders from a broad spectrum to form a unified front in a call for calm.

¶ 6. (S/REL MCFI) The Ambassador urged Jafari to make these announcements within a day in order to reassure the Iraqi people as quickly as possible. Ambassador also asked to be provided with the specifics of the security plan so that he can use them in outreach efforts with religious and political leaders.

¶ 7. (S/REL MCFI) A smaller group met the afternoon of February 24 with General Casey to review the planned public announcement. After the meeting ended, Jafari gave a press conference to announce the new security measures. The press conference was carried live on al-Iraqiyah television and repeated on several other stations later in the evening. After a short preamble Jafari read the following points.

(U) Begin Embassy Translation of speech:

Orders were given to all Iraqi security forces to play a vital and important role in this critical historic stage by maintaining security and order. We urge the Iraqi people to

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cooperate with our armed forces in eradicating the terrorists and to be vigilantly aware of the internal and external conspiracies that surround Iraq. The presence of our armed forces is for the safeguarding of the citizens and the protection of their interests.

We have decided to deploy the Iraqi armed forces and increase their presence in the areas of friction in a manner that would achieve security and stability in those areas. We have decided to prohibit entry and exit, into and from Baghdad except for police vehicles, ambulances and convoys that belong to the ministries.

We know that the imposition of curfew in some areas and at specific times limits the freedom and movement of the citizens; however the government sees that the curfew is crucial to stop the terrorists from achieving their objectives and limit their movement. We do this so we can provide our security forces the opportunity to go after the terrorists and to facilitate the mission of our armed forces in protecting the citizens. Our armed forces have confidence in the citizens and are completely aware of the reasons on which basis we took this decision.

We also decided to form an advisory political team that is comprised of a group of influential individuals, political leaders, and heads of parliamentary blocs to listen to their views concerning this crisis and to obtain their contribution in strengthening the national unity which is subjected to attempts aimed at weakening it by the terrorists and the enemies of Iraq.

We have taken all the necessary security measures to protect the holy shrines and the places of worship throughout Iraq, especially in the areas that are made up of diverse components, in addition to examining the possibility of establishing a special force for their protection.

We have also taken suitable security measures to protect the roads leading to the holy shrines and to secure them for visitors.

For the security of the citizens and the protection of their interests, all public show of weapons is prohibited on the streets and carrying of weapons without permit shall be prohibited outside of homes and shops.

In order to increase the assurance and protection of citizens in the hot spots the Government has decided to amplify the efforts and the security presence in guarding the areas in a way that reinforces the citizens, trust and strengthens security, and to reinforce all means for maintaining good order.

The Government calls on all media and cultural agencies to shoulder their national responsibilities at this critical moment of our nation's history and to play their role in pulling together national cohesion and strengthening unity among the one people and to stay clear from all that aims and leads to disunity and incites terrorism and violence, and to contribute in uncovering the plans of Iraq's enemies in their attempts to sow sectarian strife. To start of a new phase, the Government calls on all venerable religious scholars and Imams, in harmony with the responsible message given by the leading Marja, iya and the highest national interest, to shoulder their legal and national responsibilities in disseminating the spirit of brotherhood, tolerance, rejection of violence and terrorism and all that offends the lofty values of our true religion.

The Government has communicated to the concerned judicial authorities to move forward with the important judicial dossiers and quickly bring the terrorists and the criminals to justice. At the same time, the Government stressed the need to activate the Anti-terrorism Law and to enforce it on all.

The Government has decided to rebuild all that has been damaged by the Samara tragedy and all the destruction that ensued.

The Government has decided to contribute in forming an investigative committee to uncover the reasons and the motives of the Samara tragedy and what ensued thereafter, and to identify the people who neglected their duties and bring

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them to justice, and to focus the furthermost intelligence effort to uncover the perpetrators.

KHALILZAD